



TIPS ON CRATE TRAINING

Crate training your dog may take some time and effort, but it can be useful in a variety of situations. With a new dog you can use the crate to limit his access to the house until he learns all of the house rules – like what he can and cannot chew on and where he can and cannot eliminate.

A crate is also a safe way of transporting your dog in the car, as well as taking him places where he is not welcome to run freely. So it is important to your dog to properly train him on how to use a crate and to think of it as his safe place where he will be happy to spend time when needed.

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. It is important to keep two things in mind while crate training. 1) The crate should always be associated with something pleasant, and training should take place in a series of small steps- don't go too fast.

Step 1: Choose the Right Crate for Your Dog

Finding the best crate for your dog is key.

It is important not to buy a crate that is too big for your dog. Depending on how big your dog is expected to get, buy the right crate for their adult size. Get one with a divider so that you can build the space as they grow.

Step 2: Establish the Proper Mindset

Make it fun and enjoyable for your dog to be in his crate. The more the dog associates the crate with a relaxed mindset, the more he will ultimately enjoy hanging out in there. It really should be their private, relaxed space. If you put your dog in the crate when he is playing, then he will want to come back out and continue to play. But if you bring him in it when he is calm, they will likely view it as a place of rest. Start by bringing them in for 10 minutes at a time and work your way up from there.

Step 3: Placement of the Crate and Determine How Your Dog Will Be Most Comfortable

Put the crate in an area of your home where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room or living room. Put an old soft blanket or towel in the crate. Bring



your dog over to the crate and talk to him in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is securely fastened opened, so it will not hit your dog and frighten him.

Some people use dog beds or towels to create a comfy environment, but that may not always be the best option. Initially, please do not use a dog bed until you have determined if your dog is a chewer. We recommend using old towels and/or blankets that can be destroyed if he turns out to be a chewer. Once again, it's trial and error. Depending on your dog, he may tear a dog bed apart or may use it to pee on.

Step 4: Give the Dog a Treat After They Go Into the Crate

Once again, positive association rules. Initially you can use training treats when you are introducing your dog to the crate. At night, or for long periods of time we suggest giving the dog a KONG toy filled with a peanut butter and kibble mix that has been put in the freezer so that it is frozen. If you do that, when he is hanging out in the crate, he will have something that stimulates him, but he will have to work down the frozen peanut butter/kibble mix. It also gets him used to being in the crate for a longer period of time, while also associating it with an enjoyable activity. We highly recommend a chewie type of toy (not one with a squeaker) if leaving for long periods of time.

To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop some small food treats near it, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, that is okay – do not force him to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until he will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he is not interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate if you know which one is a favorite of your dogs. This step may take a few minutes. Be patient. If neither method works, we recommend you might want to consider some “higher value” treats such as cheese or lunch meat if your dog will not go in with training treats. Remember, this step may take a few minutes to as long as several days. You might have to continue this exercise constantly during the day. But do not do this for more than 15 minutes at one time.

Step 5: Feeding your dog near or in the crate

After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the create. If he is readily entering the crate when you begin, put the food dish all the way in the back of the crate. If your dog is reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little further back in the crate.



Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat his meal, you can close the door while he is eating. At first, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until he is staying in the crate for 10 minutes or so after eating. If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving him in the crate for a shorter time period. If he does whine or cry in the crate, it's imperative that you not let him out until he stops. Otherwise, he'll learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine, so he'll keep doing it.

After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him there for short time periods while you're home. Call him over to the crate and give him a treat. Give him a command to enter such as, "kennel up." Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the treat and close the door.

Sit quietly near the crate for five to 10 minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, then let him out of the crate. Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time you leave him in the crate and the length of time you're out of his sight. Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight the majority of the time, you can begin leaving him crated when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting him sleep there at night. This may take several days or several weeks.

Step 6: Keep an Eye on the Time

Your dog needs time outside the crate to play, eat, and use the bathroom. Dogs don't want to soil where they sleep, but if there's too long of a stretch without a walk, they might end up doing so.

- **Part A: Crating your dog when left alone**

After your dog is spending about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving him crated for short periods when you leave the house. Put him in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave him with a few safe toys in the crate. You'll want to vary at what point in your "getting ready to leave" routine you put your dog in the crate. Although he shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate him anywhere from five to 20 minutes prior to leaving. Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged, but matter of fact. Praise your dog briefly, give him a treat for entering the crate and then leave quietly. When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low key. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so he doesn't associate



crating with being left alone. Your dog should not be left alone in the crate for more than four to five hours at a time during the day.

- **Part B: Crating your dog at night**

Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway. Puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you will want to be able to hear him when he whines to be let out. Older dogs, too, should initially be kept nearby so that crating doesn't become associated with social isolation. Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with his crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer.

Step 7: Play Crate Games

Your dog shouldn't see the crate as a negative place. To ensure this, incorporate the crate into fun games where he goes in and out of the open crate at his own will. You can throw the ball in the crate when playing fetch or hide treats inside for him to find. These exercises will also allow you to learn about what your dog likes.

Step 8: Keep Your Dog "Naked"

Your dog should never, ever have tags, harnesses, sweaters, etc. on when he is in the crate. If the tag gets caught in the crate, he could strangle.

Step 9: Set Your Dog Up for Success

Once you are ready to give your dog more time inside the crate, do it in small steps. You don't want to go out to dinner for six hours until you know that your dog can handle that amount of time in the crate. Try going out for a cup of coffee and come back first. A good trick is to set an alarm on your phone when you leave so you don't lose track of the time. Also, if you can, set up a recording device to determine what your dog does while you're gone. Some you can view while you are out of the house. Is he anxious? Is he pacing? Or is he calm? In this way, you know — and when you come back, you can reward him, or you can come back quickly if you see he is anxious or pacing.

Step 10: Be Patient

Prepare yourself for at least six months of training. There will be ups and downs since dogs aren't linear learners, but success will come. Even when it feels like you're banging your head against a wall, as long as you stay calm and consistent in your methodology, your dog will eventually look for the reward and you'll have the opportunity to reward them.



Potential problems

Too much time in the crate: A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated. For example, if your dog is crated all day while you're at work and then crated again all night, he's spending too much time in too small a space. Other arrangements should be made to accommodate his physical and emotional needs. Also remember that puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders and bowels for longer periods.

Whining: If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether he's whining to be let out of the crate, or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. If you followed the training procedures outlined above, your dog hasn't been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from his crate. Try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, he'll probably stop whining soon. Yelling at him or pounding on the crate will only make things worse.

If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, use the phrase he associates with going outside to eliminate. If he responds and becomes excited, take him outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Don't give in, otherwise you'll teach your dog to whine loudly to get what he wants.

If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

Separation anxiety: Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but he may injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counterconditioning and desensitization procedures. You may want to seek assistance from a dog behavioral assessor or a dog trainer for help.

Remember: You can always contact your Trenton Animal Shelter Adoption Counselor or Adoption Coordinator to see if the Trenton Animal Shelter trainer can contact you to see if she can help.

